

Rev. Wil Gafney to speak at Eden Seminary, preach at Christ the King

Womanism is reshaping seminary education, churches and lives

By Sonya Vann
For The St. Louis American

In the fall of 2014, people from across the world followed the events happening in Ferguson after Michael Brown was killed. Rev. Wil Gafney wrote in her blog, "A black man STRANGLER (lynched?) by a police officer on a city street on video. The flower of black manhood has been shot down in the street like a dog. Left to lay in his blood for hours. Followed by a police response straight out of the manual of Bull Connor. Riot gear more up-armored than US forces in Iraq." She would later say that she had been stunned into silence amid the summer of horror.

Gafney is just one of the clergy scholars who observed the events of the fall of 2014 and used their scholarship to address the injustice they saw. Evoking her womanist biblical interpretation Gafney addresses the issues that affect the black community because "whiteness is invisible like the wizard in the Oz or the emperor's [new] clothes has meant that bible readers and hearers have not seen the ways in which interpretations they normalize and sanctify are steeped in white and often white supremacist values, like the white Jesus that still adorns many black churches."

To continue this dialogue and shed more light on womanists who are shaping the world,

Eden Theological Seminary has introduced a series of womanist scholars. Gafney will speak on the subject of "Womanist Biblical Translation & Hermeneutics" at Eden Theological Seminary, 475 E. Lockwood Ave. in Webster Groves 1:30-3 p.m. Friday, October 5 after worship service at 10 a.m. and a lunch break.

In late August, Rev. Jennifer Leath, assistant professor of Religion and Social Justice at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, addressed the Eden community. She expressed her concern that the "black church has traditionally been organized around a single male leadership model even where women make up 80 percent of the black congregation. Yet, the womanist voice and interpretation of the biblical narrative that pay interest to women is absent much, if not most, of the time."

This is changing. People of color are attending seminary in higher numbers, from 16.7 percent to 28.1 percent over a 10-year period (2003-2013), and more than half of them are black women, according to the Association of Theological Schools, which provides accreditation to most schools of theology. This growth is representative of the need for theologically educated clergy and leaders who are poised to do justice on the fly. Their ability to speak to the fragmentation and disengagement of the traditional biblical text to their situation is



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helped by the uptick of womanist biblical interpretation and scholarship.

Gafney reflected upon the journey of her mentor, the Rev. Katie Cannon, who alongside Delores Williams helped to break the glass ceiling of biblical interpretation in seminaries. Womanists have been a strong presence throughout the fight for civil rights in this country, going back to Sojourner Truth, Mary Bethune McCleod, Rosa Parks, Shirley Chisolm and including today's leaders, such as Patrisse Cullers, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, Tarana Burke, U.S. Rep. Maxine Clark and Eden graduates Rev. Cassandra Gould and Rev. Traci Blackmon. These women of color have proven to be great orators of womanist thought. These seminary graduates, and others like them, are also leading

nonprofits, health systems, foundations and in civil service as elected officials.

The voices of Leath and Gafney come at a critical time in the movement to transform this country from what it was to what it someday will be.

Gafney lecture at Eden Theological Seminary on October 5 is free, and everyone is welcome. Register at www.eden.edu/events/schmiechen-lecture.

Gafney also will preach at Christ the King United Church of Christ, 11370 Old Halls Ferry Rd. in Florissant, at 11 a.m. Sunday, October 7. For more information see www.ckk-ucc.org.

Sonya J. Vann is director of the Master of Community Leadership at Eden Theological Seminary and associate minister at Christ the King United Church of Christ.

The Message

The time of your life

As I get older I have become even more fascinated with the concept of time. I've always found time as it is talked about in the Bible to be an awesome concept if we can just grasp it and apply time and its value to our own lives. What is time, and what are the consequences of actively experiencing time?

At its simplest, time is the reality we experience between life and death. One's consciousness is the sum total of time spent in the body you now inhabit. We neither control when we are born, nor when we die, unless one chooses to commit suicide. But to a certain degree, we do have some control over how we spend our time.

The older you get, the more value you place on time and the less value you put on things. Spending time wisely becomes much more than just a phrase used to explain how time actually does fly by when you're not paying attention.

Scripture teaches us that God is the progenitor of time. "I am the Alpha and the Omega who is, and who was and who is to come, the Almighty," Revelations 1:8.

Did you ever think about Christ as being the epicenter of how we measure human existence, time? You have B.C. and then A.D. The human embodiment of God is also modern man's calendar reference.

Scripture also tells us that the best use of our time should be spent searching for, finding and then honoring the Almighty by trying to mirror the life and values put forth by His Son Jesus Christ. If anything that I'm saying has any merit, then wasting time must be viewed as one big unacceptable sin, one in which the devil takes great pleasure in having you indulge. Do nothing with your time and he's a very happy fella.

The mystery of life is easily solved by using and spending God's most precious yet fleeting gift wisely. That's probably why unconditional love is so rare.

What are the most valuable memories that you have? I'll bet you they involve an appreciation for time spent in the presence of a lost loved one or being around people you love or who indeed loved you. That time becomes more precious as you age and understand the great gift of simple time.

I guess it all boils down to, if you really put time into perspective, God, family and everything else, time is not money, but, like money time should not be squandered. It should be nurtured. If you waste money, bankruptcy is the end result. If you waste a life of time, it is even more devastating because you've bankrupted the whole point of living.



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